Introduction

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Gothic Renaissance

A reassessment

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Contents

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Introduction

Elisabeth Bronfen and Beate Neumeier

Since the emergence of the Gothic novel in the second half of the eighteenth century, authors have self-consciously acknowledged a cultural debt to Shakespeare's work, by virtue of either intertextual citation or explicit homage. As Horace Walpole wrote in his preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, 'Shakespeare, was the model I copied' (44). Having recourse to this national poet was constitutive, legitimizing, as it does, above all the mixture of genres so typical of the Gothic novel. Within the field of Gothic studies, much has been written about the manner in which 'Gothic writers' came to appropriate Shakespeare, along with Marlowe and Milton. At the same time, the reconfiguration of the term 'Gothic' from a historical genre ranging from Walpole to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to a mode of writing, traceable in different genres and media from the nineteenth century into contemporary culture, has necessarily reopened questions about the implicit historical onset of Gothic sensibility, aesthetics and textuality. This new conception of the Gothic has inspired a nascent dialogue between scholars from the field of Gothic studies and those of Shakespeare and the Renaissance. Among the first volumes to explore this vibrant interface are the collections of essays *Gothic Shakespeares* (Drakakis and Townshend), and *Shakespearean Gothic* (Desmet and Williams). While both collections address questions of Shakespeare's 'Gothic potential', the majority of essays focuses on the Bard's Gothic afterlife.

Our volume *Gothic Renaissance* represents an intervention into this developing critical debate. Our aim is to expand the existing discussion by focusing on the lines of connection between a Gothic sensibility and the Renaissance period, exploring Shakespeare's texts alongside and in relation to those by other playwrights, as well as to other textual genres, from poetry and epic narratives to ghost stories, prose dialogues and political pamphlets. It is precisely this widening of the focus that enables a careful historical investigation which avoids a dehistoricized and inflationary use of the term Gothic. What then does it mean to postulate a

Gothic Renaissance, to attribute a Gothic sensibility to both dramatic and non-dramatic texts written in early modern England? If the term 'Gothic' was first introduced in the field of art history as a synonym for the barbaric, conceived in contrast to the harmonious symmetry of the classical, its most prominent themes involve tales of the supernatural, of spectral appearances, witchcraft and the seduction by demonic forces. The complex emotional responses Gothic sensibility speaks to are the fear, surprise and awe called forth by a foregrounding of the fragility of human existence, of the presence of death in the midst of life and the delimination of human freedom which the laws of mortality dictate.

To speak of a Gothic sensibility, however, also draws attention to the fact that at issue are both an intellectual and an affective approach towards the world. The attitude assumed in relation to power structures, psychic dispositions and aesthetic representations of these is, furthermore, based on an acute sense of boundary blurrings. First and foremost is the awareness of a sustained presence of magical thinking within a conception of the world increasingly ruled by the law of scientific rationality. Gothic sensibility thus speaks to the incursion of the irrational into the rational, the extraordinary into the ordinary everyday, the monstrous into the human, bringing into focus the nocturnal side of diurnal social and psychic activities. It addresses subversive fantasies of transgression, whether in regard to gender (troubling stable notions of masculinity and femininity), in regard to social orders (challenging hegemonic patriarchal or sovereign power), or in regard to disciplinary discourses (dictating what is deemed licit and what illicit and deviant). The disruption may also, however, pertain to the boundaries of an individual's identity, opening up to the truth to be found in visions, hallucinations, and madness, or to the desires released when the cultured subject no longer represses her or his allegedly barbaric instincts.

What the Gothic puts on display is, then, a shift from the strictly codified public life to an inner world at once liberating and imprisoning in its privileging of subjective fantasies and anxieties. To conceive of Macbeth's and Hamlet's ghost-seeing, Ophelia's madness or the reanimation of Hermione's statue as early modern articulations of Gothic sensibility means foregrounding how violent eruptions of radical subjectivity (whether ambition, melancholia, hysteria or jealousy) render visible the presence of forbidden desires within a normative order of the world. Dramatically embodied, these psychic energies give voice to the toxic underbelly of symbolic laws, which can be suppressed but never fully obliterated. And yet, while the transgressions we attribute to Gothic sensibility serve to trouble identity categories, dominant knowledge systems and hegemonic power structures, they never fully shatter these.

Their revolutionary impulse is always again contained. As the power-hungry soldier, the death-driven prince, the sexually distraught daughter all find their predestined death, their challenge to the order of things is once more stabilized.

Equally seminal for the line of connection between the Gothic culture that was to intervene in the Enlightenment project around 1800 and the cultural shift from the medieval to the early modern around 1530 is the fact that both draw attention to the sustained presence of archaic cultural energies. With its interest in ruins, crypts, graveyards and hidden spaces that serve as sites of secret and hidden knowledge, Gothic imagination emerges as an articulation of cultural nostalgia. It evokes a past which the present looks to either as a source of inspiration and comfort or as the embodiment of a barbarism that must, once more, be overcome. Indeed, ghost stories, blurring the distinction between life and death, as well as tales of vampires, returning from their graves to find nourishment among the living, speak to the way the past returns to feed on the present. In a similar vein, prophetic dream visions and hallucinations (as these abound in both early modern and Gothic culture) speak to the idea of a prior knowledge of the supernatural either yearned for as a correction to the dominant mode of thinking or invoked as a seminal threat to the laws of rationality.

Gothic sensibility is thus both revolutionary in its challenge to the hegemonic ordering of the world and conservative in its recourse to archaic cultural energies. Precisely by drawing attention to cultural anxieties regarding a destabilization of identity categories, it helps to redraw these. While any discussion of the familiar ascriptions of the Gothic as a 'hybrid genre', 'literature of subversion' and 'transgressive mode of writing' must be situated historically, it is our aim to relate these issues back to the early modern period as a poignant moment of transition, in which categories of individual, gendered, racial and national identity began to emerge, and to relate the religious and the pictorial turn within early modern textual production to a reassessment of Gothic culture. It is precisely the notion of subjectivity and its transgressions as developed during the Renaissance which once again become prevalent under the auspices of the revolutionary moments that emerge from the world of the late eighteenth century, and which are reformulated again in contemporary culture.

It can be argued that the attempt to locate texts asserting the existence of a Gothic sensibility *avant la lettre* (rereading Shakespeare and the Renaissance period in terms of a pre- or proto-Gothic potential) is inevitably engaging in what Mieke Bal has called a 'preposterous' historical endeavour. While the word 'preposterous' literally means contrary to

nature, reason, or common sense, Bal offers an ingenious spin on the term. To look preposterously at the literature of the past through later refigurations that have coloured our conception of it means drawing attention to what remains hidden when one limits oneself to more conventional intertextual influences. Such a revisitation of past texts does not collapse past and present 'in an ill-conceived presentism', nor does it 'objectify the past and bring it within our grasp, as in the problematic positivist historicism'. Instead, this 'reversal, which puts what comes chronologically first ("pre") as an after-effect behind ("post") its later recyclings', for Bal entails a way of doing history, of dealing with the past today (6–7). With this collection of essays, we propose looking back at dramatic and non-dramatic texts of the English Renaissance through the lens of the Gothic culture that emerged in the late eighteenth century, precisely because, as moments of cultural transition, both define themselves by looking back at the prior historical moment from which they developed. At issue is, thus, a double backward gaze. While the early modern imagination struggles with and against the barbarism of supernatural thinking it seeks to supersede, the Enlightenment project is predicated on bringing light to the remaining dark areas on the map of knowledge by (again) suppressing a more archaic magical thinking. The line of connection which the shared Gothic sensibility brings to the fore is, thus, the manner in which both the mid-sixteenth and the late eighteenth century are constitutively troubled by previous cultural energies, either erupting again or refusing to be suppressed, so as to give voice to the strange within the familiar.

In other words, we propose looking back at the early modern cultural imaginary through the lens of its subsequent recycling in Gothic culture so as to foreground how the Renaissance itself was looking back to the archaic knowledge of the supernatural, recycling prior cultural energies so as to contain them. By exploring the line of connection between these distinct but interrelated historical moments, two questions arise. What archaic knowledge has persisted, and in so doing has achieved a cultural afterlife in the form of remnants that call upon and resuscitate a prior mode of conceiving and making sense of the world? And what cultural energies, having already been overcome or repressed, have resiliently returned to be taken notice of again? The haunting so prevalently thematized by Gothic sensibility calls upon us to address how the past we look back at through its subsequent aesthetic refiguration splices together the notion of cultural survival with that of a return of the repressed. Our current critical interest in the Gothic asks us to interrogate where this rich and strange legacy begins. We do so because we are equally concerned with discovering what the haunting

celebrated around 1800 says about its early modern predecessor. It is precisely through a careful historicization of the earlier texts that their Gothic resonances in later periods can be productively addressed. These resonances were felt by Gothic novelists from the late eighteenth century onwards and they are felt again – differently – in contemporary culture by writers as well as theatre and film directors of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries who return to Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the context of the current proliferation of the Gothic. To re-map Gothic literature onto the literary production of the Renaissance thus does not entail undoing the historical distinction between the two by collapsing two historical moments. Rather, it allows us to explore the consequences of this relation for a conjoined reading of both sets of cultural texts, with their similarities *and* differences in mind.

The scholarly interest in these resonances surfaces in psychoanalytic, feminist and post-structural readings of both the Renaissance and the Gothic, which, each onto their own, have persistently foregrounded issues of madness, monstrosity, trauma, desire and death, relating these to questions of genre, gender and national self-definition. Despite these shared theoretical approaches, it was curiously Freud's discussion of the uncanny, a ubiquitous term in scholarly work on Gothic fiction, which for a long time effectively barred the exploration of a Gothic Renaissance, in its explicit exclusion of the ghostly apparitions in Shakespeare's plays from the realm of the uncanny. However, the increasing focus on Kristeva's conception of the abject as a critical tool in Gothic and in Renaissance studies allows for an exploration and re-evaluation of possible links between both areas of research. In this context the notion of the monstrous as historically situated articulation of anxieties about processes of cultural transformation can highlight similarities as well as differences. The definitions of the monstrous as liminal, transgressive and transformative (Shildrick) draw attention to the negotiation of boundaries between supernatural/natural, human/animal, masculine/feminine, self/other, madness/sanity, spirit/matter which are decisive in Gothic as well as Renaissance studies. The monstrous refers to the moment of cultural transformation and its result, to transgression as well as affirmation of boundaries, foregrounding the constitution of as well as resistance against norms. Thus the monstrous is situated between tendencies of exteriorization (as external threat to be eliminated) and interiorization (as mere psychological projection).

In this context the English Renaissance period with its emerging emphasis on individual subjectivity and national identity seems indeed an apt starting point for a historically specific investigation into connections with the Gothic. The early modern obsession with monstrous

creatures and horrifying phenomena can be accounted for only on the grounds of a complex web of historical discourses, as studies such as Stuart Clark's cultural history of early modern vision (2007) have shown, exploring the religious and philosophical, medical and political ideas and interests connected to the evaluation of phenomena like witchcraft and magic, madness and demonology (Clark). The 'preposterous' critical gaze this book proposes is that we revisit the manner in which early modern discourses of scientific rationality could only contain but never obliterate such magical thinking, by recalling a similar gesture of exteriorization on the part of the Enlightenment project. Any cultural valorization of unveiling requires dark uncharted areas on the map of knowledge to which the light of reason can be brought. The Gothic responds to this equation of truth with disclosure by making obscure once more the knowledge it insists we cannot have direct access to, or which we prefer not to know in any unmitigated manner (see Bronfen). Looking back at the early modern period through the lens of the Gothic brings a seminal distinction to light. While the Renaissance is haunted by the very magical thinking it is in the process of displacing, Gothic culture emerges in the late eighteenth century at a time when the rational discourse has reached its acme. What was initially a gesture of abjection returns as a gesture of reverting back to a conception of the world that privileges the nocturnal, the transgressive, the spectral and the extraordinary.

Tracking the lines of connection between Gothic sensibilities and the discursive network of the Renaissance, the chapters in this book facilitate a re-evaluation of both. Indeed, they draw our attention to a discussion of what cultural forces produced the development between different historical moments. Thus the Gothic English Renaissance seems to foreground transformational moments and processes, negotiating and reformulating the boundary between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the non-human, the norm and the monstrous in the context of the religious, philosophical and scientific turn of the time. The monstrous creatures of late eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic novels, on the other hand, point towards the return of a repressed disruption, while contemporary versions of the Gothic seem to be obsessed with the dissolution of boundaries. Our hope is that by making a claim for a culturally persistent 'boundary-work', this volume will produce a critical discussion aimed at filling in the gap we can merely gesture towards.

The chapters of this volume address a wide variety of Renaissance writers and literary genres, from Shakespeare and Webster to Middleton and Jonson, from Spenser to Donne, from drama to epic to poetry, to

folk tales to political pamphlets, linked to an investigation into the later impact of a Gothicized Renaissance. The manifold resonances between the chapters in terms of primary textual references to Renaissance texts as well as in terms of theoretical approaches and questions raised testify to the many connections opening up a rich field of further research into Renaissance Gothic. The chapters have been arranged in four parts, beginning with readings that pick up and expand on treating Shakespeare's dramas in the light of Gothic concerns. The second part extends the conversation to other Renaissance dramatists. The third part focuses on non-dramatic genres of writing in the Renaissance, while the final section rethinks the persistence of Gothic sensibility as this links modern texts to Shakespeare in light of the inaugural moment we claim the Renaissance to be. Although the opening section of this volume is dedicated to Shakespeare, the contributors venture out in their chapters to establish connections to other writers and genres. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the point of departure for John Drakakis's investigation of notions of death and decay as well as for Catherine Belsey's exploration of early modern stage ghosts. Drakakis takes the use of a real skull in Gregory Doran's RSC production of the play (2008) as the starting-point for a discussion of the implications of rereading the Renaissance through the history of the Gothic in terms of the current obsession with notions of death, material and virtual reality. Drawing on a wide variety of Renaissance writers including Donne, Webster and Middleton as well as on Gothic novelists such as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Isabella Kelly, he discusses possible connections and their legitimacy in connection to theoretical approaches from Freud to Bataille and Derrida.

Catherine Belsey uses a historical approach to explore Shakespeare's introduction of 'mystery, uncertainty, equivocation (the components of the uncanny)' to the Renaissance stage through an integration of 'the popular tradition of fireside ghost stories' in the intertextual web of his plays. Taking up key terms of the Gothic such as the macabre, terror, equivocation and the uncanny, Belsey explores Shakespeare's use of ghostly apparitions for a 'blending of existing conventions to change the parameters for fiction', addressing uncertainties about the relation between spirit and matter, about the reliability of the senses. Belsey locates the difference of Shakespearean ghosts from earlier stage ghosts rooted in the classical tradition in their direct interaction with the world of the living, in the evocation of terror shared by the onstage characters, and in the persistence of uncertainty and equivocation. Accordingly 'Shakespeare's alteration of paradigm might be most evident' in plays like *The Changeling*, *The Lady's Tragedy/Second Maiden's Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The Atheist's Tragedy*, even if this is where 'his

direct influence is least apparent'. Belsey thus identifies Shakespeare's own *Macbeth* as 'the main beneficiary of *Hamlet*'s bequest to posterity' in terms of an undecidability which 'enlightenment science longed to dispel', and which 'later Gothic continued to permit in fiction'.

Per Sivefors uses a different approach to historicize Shakespearean Gothic by investigating Renaissance dream theories in relation to notions of conscience, arguing that it is an increasingly 'ambiguous status of conscience [which] pushes dreams in direction of a psychologizing approach – dreams as revealing truths about the human self' after the Reformation. Thus the Reformation shift towards linking individualized interiority, conscience and guilt is seen as prefiguration of the 'internalized conscience' of the Gothic (Sage). In this context the (proto-)Gothicism of the nightmares in Shakespeare's *Richard III* is connected to their 'function of a guilty conscience'. The 'staged vision of the ghosts becomes an image of Richard's divided interior' as 'the level of introspection is more important than the level of divine retribution'. In this sense the Shakespearean nightmares anticipate 'an irresolution between supernatural and psychological causes' in Gothic fiction (Hogle 213).

In her chapter on the Gothic elements in Shakespeare's dramatic historical re-imagination of the Wars of the Roses, Elisabeth Bronfen introduces the issue of gender into her discussion of the political and aesthetic deployment of spectral apparitions. Focusing on Queen Margaret's uncanniness as 'woman and ruler', who 'embod[ies] the political unconscious of her world', her reading of Shakespeare's history plays 'through the lens of contemporary popular culture' allows her to locate the plays' 'Gothic sensibility' in the 'ambivalence about feminine political power read through subsequent recycling, resurfacing in contemporary cultural imagination' such as Tony Gilroy's film *Michael Clayton* (2007). At issue in her reading is the Gothic legacy of the monstrous female body as this gives voice both then and now to 'dark positions in political power games'. At the same time, linking current films attesting to a cultural anxiety about female politicians and Shakespeare's Gothic warrior queen in his early history plays, she also locates 'the spectral power on which the mutual implication of dramatic violence on stage and political violence off stage thrives', as another part of the cultural legacy of Gothic sensibility.

In the chapters in the second section, presenting other Renaissance dramatists, the definitions of the Gothic foreground notions of uncertainty and equivocation and/or notions of fear in terms of the uncanny or the abject, often in connection to notions of hybridity, of mixing (as in the grotesque, the bizarre). Drawing on Todorov's concept of the

fantastic and Kristeva's abject, Beate Neumeier focuses on the nexus between cognitive and affective uncertainties in conjunction with a historical analysis of the impact of notions of vision, death and desire for the negotiation of early modern boundaries between spirit and matter, the human and the non-human and its gendered implications through ghostly apparitions as well as monstrous creatures like witches or devil-dogs and hybrid genres such as tragicomedy.

Questions of genre are equally central to Lynn Meskill's exploration of the 'proto-Gothic obsessions' of Ben Jonson, who is probably one of the least likely Renaissance authors to be associated with such an endeavour. However, as Meskill persuasively argues, the 'labyrinthine poetics' of Jonson's comedies and his masques in particular testify to a 'seventeenth century Gothic as combination of Jacobean charnel house and the Grotesque'. Meskill reads *The Masque of Queenes* in terms of the grotesque and hybrid with regard to characters, genres, registers and references. In this context Jonson's excessive notes on the margins turn into an 'account of authorial creation of a kind of monster out of fragments and pieces'. Thus his marginal references to witchcraft (drawn from 'a variety of sources ... from antiquity, folktales, modern authorities, personal memories of stories and rumours') serve both to rationalize and to heighten the effect of terror, which culminates in Jonson's 'monstrous mixing of the living and the dead' in his 'vision of Queen Anne', 'crowned by the dead' queens of past ages.

The third section, aimed at taking stock of a Gothic textuality of non-dramatic genres of writing in the early modern period, begins with a chapter by Duncan Salkeld, who recognizes 'the fusion of death and desire' on the early modern English stage as origin 'of the kind of aesthetic now recognisable as the Gothic'. Identifying the courtesan as the embodiment of this fusion, he reads the Zoppino dialogue as a paradigmatic text signalling the shift from a dialectic relation to a fusion of fascination and revulsion with a 'contaminating female body' through a scopophobic experience. Salkeld traces this obsessive desire for the dead female body to the English Renaissance stage, and to plays like *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. The link between death and desire (in religious and sexual terms) is also recognized as one of the key features of 'Gothic affinities in metaphysical poetry' by Ulrike Zimmermann. Her reading of Donne's poetry foregrounds the proto-Gothic mode as a way to deal critically with historical and cultural heritage, particularly with Petrarchan love poetry via assimilation, parody, and distortion through notions of excess and literalization, as in 'The Dampe', where the speaker's deadly female lover is scrutinized with medical expertize.

Garrett Sullivan turns to another variant of monstrous femininity in his analysis of Spenser's *Fairie Queene* and of Gothic readings of Acrasia as vampire. According to his argument, 'readings of Spenser's text that centre on psychic processes such as projection, or denial, or abjection find substantiation in the tripartite soul', as 'the tripartite soul introduces into the conception of human vitality a vocabulary for depicting and exploring the nature of self-division'. At the same time Sullivan emphatically emphasizes historical difference, clarifying that 'the tripartite soul enables the Gothic to recognize itself in Spenser'. The importance of historical difference is equally central to Andrea Brady, whose chapter explores the political implications of Renaissance Gothic from different historical and cultural angles. Andrea Brady analyses the complex implications of the return of supernatural phenomena in mid-seventeenth century pamphlet accounts of ghostly hauntings (about 'real sightings as well as rhetorical ghosts in political satire') against a growing 'widespread scepticism'. She traces this return not only to the persistence of folk tradition but also to a conscious attempt by the Cambridge Platonists Henry More and Joseph Glanville to restore a 'consensus which was eroding – in divine retribution, in immortal soul, in providence of history, in vision as access to truth'. The defence of ghostly apparitions is identified by Brady as a 'conservative' project to ward off 'the threat [they believed] scepticism posed to church and state'. Brady's analysis shows how the uncertainty and equivocation conjured in early modern plays is counteracted not only by a turn towards the uncanny in terms of psychological interiorization but also by an insistence on the supernatural as complementary movements towards closure.

The final section addresses the issue of a cultural legacy of the Gothic which links eighteenth and nineteenth century narratives back to the early modern period, and particularly the manner in which Shakespeare's plays blur boundaries between the living and the dead, English national identity and its Scottish other, as well as the human and the inhuman. A gendered aspect of the Gothic stands at the centre of Richard Wilson's analysis of cryptomimesis in *The Winter's Tale*, 'an unhomely Gothic horror hidden beneath the homely dwelling of a romance'. Drawing on Kristeva's notion of the abject, and linking Freud's mourning and melancholia to Bataille and Derrida, Wilson explores the play's monstrous liminality, tracing its ambivalences about the boundary between life and death, in terms of notions of resurrection and of being buried alive. 'Retelling the play as a proto-Gothic text' thus 'through a "perversion" of Shakespeare brings the play's own "perversities" to light'. In a truly Gothic twist Wilson ends his exploration of the 'subterranean affinity

between Shakespeare and Gothic narrative' with a fascinating rendering of the haunting history of Shakespeare's house in Stratford visited by E. A. Poe. The political dimension of the construction of a Gothic Shakespeare in the eighteenth century is explored on a national scale in Dale Townshend's historical analysis of the 'complex relationship' between the terms Scottish and Gothic. Distinguishing between a political and an aesthetic Gothicism, Townshend reads the construction of Scottish Gothic through a 'phantasmatic projection' of Shakespeare 'as our British rather than English Gothic Bard' in response to the 'threat of Scottish nationalism' embodied in Ossian as Scottish Bard. In this sense the rise of the Gothic novel is aptly linked to the 'othering of Scotland' in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Our volume ends with a final 'monstrous legacy of a Renaissance construe[d] as irrepressibly Gothic and ominously modern', taken up in Andreas Höfele's reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* through Oscar Wilde's late nineteenth century Gothic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Höfele takes Wilde's reference to Caliban in the preface of the novel as a starting-point for a comparative investigation into the human/animal boundary within early modern and post-Darwinian discourses revealing 'the grounds of the late nineteenth century Gothicization of the Renaissance' in the striking affinities between unstable early modern boundaries and the 'metamorphic', 'abhuman' Gothic body of the *fin de siècle* (see Hurley 3–4). Foregrounding a fascinating 'swap of epistemic affiliations', Höfele shows how 'Dorian Gray roots himself in Renaissance Knowledge culture', while 'Caliban is adopted into the image store of popular science' turning into the 'Shakespearean icon of Darwinism'.

The collection of essays thus helps us to isolate three distinct but interrelated links between the early modern cultural imaginary and Gothic sensibility. The first involves a troubling of hegemonic order, pitting the irrational against the rational, femininity against patriarchal authority, bestiality against the human, insurgency against authoritative rulership, and ghostly visitation against the world of the living. The contester to dominant power is often shaped into a composite figure, equating the feminine with magical thinking and subversive transgression or the ethnic other with barbarous instincts. By giving voice to the remains or returns of repressed knowledge, Gothic sensibility draws attention to the earlier cultural energies that will never fully be overcome. The second link pertains to the fact that this scene of instruction – 'monstrous' in that by recalling a past it offers a prophetic warning – self-consciously uses fiction as the site of the possible. Here disturbances of the hegemonic norm (the ordinary, the plausible) can be played through with impunity, identity boundaries can be broken down,

bodies reshaped. The conceptual experiments these aesthetic texts afford, render visible the very process of repression and return. The point of the Gothic mode is to affect the audience or readers not only intellectually, but above all viscerally; to perform on the level of emotional response the destabilization of categories thematically at issue. They draw the spectator and reader into the magical thinking they unfold, calling upon their imaginary capacity to partake in a world that takes but the form and shape of airy nothing. By self-consciously addressing the spectral quality of any engagement with fictional texts, they call upon us to suspend our disbelief, regardless of whether the supernatural is ultimately explained, simply accepted, or once more repressed.

The third link between Gothic sensibility and the early modern cultural imaginary resides in this period's ambivalence regarding the incursion of the supernatural into the ordinary. It could, as Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might maintain, simply be a trick of an overly heated imagination, or it could be the result of actual witchcraft. If, in turn, it was deemed to be a reliable expression of magic, it could be either malign or benign, producing either horror or delight, and as such sharing with the audience a nightmare vision or that of a brave new world. As Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton argue in the exhibition *Shakespeare: Staging the World*, there is the political witchcraft embodied by the three sisters in *Macbeth*, which troubled James's accession to the throne and whose ungovernable, barbarous power he alludes to in his tract *Daemonologie* (1597). But there is also the enchantment of Prospero in *The Tempest*, bringing justice to usurpers and opening our awareness not just to a new world beyond the British Isles but also to the sustained imaginary power of the theatre stage (and the printed page), where the ghosts of the past take shape over and over again. And there is the restorative magic of Paulina, bringing with it the resurrection of a cruelly maligned wife in *Winter's Tale*, and with it the restitution of a royal marriage. As site of the possible par excellence, fiction proves to remain the arena where the antagonism between these two intertwined notions of magical thinking, politically subversive and emotionally uplifted, can be sustained.

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